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ABSTRACT

This essay addresses the use of experience-based teacher education and staff development to foster strong school communities. An evaluation of an innovative course sequence for prospective teachers at Stanford University (California), the Experiential Curricula Project, is discussed. Particular focus is on the program's ability to foster community both among students and among students and teachers in an urban multicultural setting. Current reform strategies intended to promote teacher and school community include site-based management, magnet programs, school-within-a-school programs, and restructuring. These reform efforts met with limited success in creating a strong community in schools because of three obstacles: (1) organizational efforts do not provide teachers with experiences on which to draw; (2) organizational efforts do not provide teachers with the pedagogical techniques or the curricular orientation necessary to foster community in schools; and (3) organizational efforts emphasize the instrumental rather than intrinsic value of community. Experience-based teacher training and staff development gives participants a positive community experience and equips them with the pedagogical and curricular tools needed adequately to foster community among students. (LL)

- ABSTRACT -

Building Community
A Model for Teacher Education and Staff Development

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Presented at the 1992 Conference of the American Educational Research Association, this paper calls for the use of experience-based teacher education and staff development to foster strong school communities. The authors discuss an evaluation of the Experiential Curricula Project at Stanford University, an innovative course sequence for prospective teachers. They focus in particular on the program's ability to foster community both among students and among students and teachers in an urban multi-cultural setting. They examine current reform strategies intended to promote teacher and school community including site-based management, magnet programs, school-within-a-school programs and restructuring and argue that these reforms meet with limited success in creating strong community in schools because of three obstacles: (1) organizational efforts do not provide teachers with experiences on which to draw, (2) organizational efforts do not provide teachers with the pedagogical techniques or the curricular orientation necessary to effectively foster and sustain community in schools, and (3) organizational efforts commonly emphasize the instrumental rather than intrinsic value of community. The paper highlights the potential contribution experience-based teacher training and staff development can make to the creation of more supportive and inclusive learning environments for students as well as teachers.

Building Community
A Model for Teacher Education and Staff Development

A Paper presented at the 1992 Conference of
The American Educational Research Association
San Francisco, California

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> Today we see the weakening and collapse of communities of obligations and commitment, collapse of coherent belief systems, of the sense of identity and belonging, of opportunities for allegiance, for being needed and responding to need -- and a corresponding rise in feelings of alienation, anonymity and impotence. (Gardner, 1990, p.4.)

John Gardner describes the loneliness and despair echoed in many spheres of contemporary experience. Commonly attributed to cities but now prominent in suburban and rural localities as well, the dissolution of community is of growing concern to educators. As a result, school researchers and practitioners are working to provide students with support, a sense of common mission, and a sense of belonging. Strong school communities, they assert, can diminish the isolation and divisive competitior that results from preoccupation with individual rather than collective goals.

At the same time, many school reformers hope to promote professional community among teachers arguing that such communities have the potential to revitalize pedagogy, to

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[1]Joel Westheimer founded and was the instructor for the Experiential Curricula Project at Stanford University's School of Education. Joseph Kahne joined the project last year and has been working to expand, develop and assess the program's progress.

decrease discipline problems, and to professionalize teaching. They aim to create the organizational space for teachers to share ideas and make decisions about their curriculum and their school.

Building community is a vital and hopeful response to the isolation and alienation felt by both teachers and students (Lieberman, 1984; 1990; Wehlage, 1988; Raywid, 1988; Goodlad, 1984). But reform efforts have largely failed to effectively foster community in schools (Sarason, 1990). While teachers, administrators and policy makers recognize the need for stronger school communities, the means for achieving this goal remains unclear. At the same time, the nature of the goal itself is a matter of dispute.

Do students working together on a math problem set constitute community? Are team-teaching, peer review or school-wide organizational changes likely to strengthen professional community? How can we foster student and professional community? Where do we begin? Experience-based teacher education and staff development offers a promising avenue for promoting both teacher and school community.

The Experiential Curricula Project began two and one half years ago as a one-term course offered in the School of Education at Stanford University.[2] During the course, prospective teachers designed and implemented experience-based curricula for students,

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[2]We thank David Tyack, Larry Cuban and Mike Smith for their help and guidance. Though we accept responsibility for the program's goals and direction, it could not have happened without their support and encouragement.

teachers and administrators from a local urban high school. The course sought to use experience-based teacher education to foster community in schools.

Since that time, the program has expanded considerably. With funding from Sun Microsystems, the Peninsula Community Foundation and the Stanford School of Education, we have to date worked with 35 Stanford students, 120 middle and high school students in the Bay Area and 8 teachers and administrators. We are currently considering a proposal to work directly with the Palo Alto Unified and Sequoia school districts to serve an even greater population.

From the beginning, the motivation behind the program had two major themes:

- to RECAST RELATIONSHIPS in schools both among teachers and between teachers and students.
- to bridge theory and practice for school of education students.

This talk focuses on the theoretical foundations that motivated the design of this program.

Building Strong Communities in Schools

When we talk about strengthening relationships, we are talking about community - building strong community in schools. Wednesday, in her Presidential Address, Ann Lieberman called for a research agenda which bridges the worlds of theory and practice and emphasized the need for connectedness and school communities. And yesterday Milbrey McLaughlin's invited address demonstrated

the importance of strong teacher communities. Unfortunately, these types of community are exceedingly rare in schools. Reformers have worked hard towards two goals: building teacher community and building school community.

Ann Lieberman (1990), Roland Barth (1990), Milbrey McLaughlin (1990; 1992) and others have demonstrated the importance of strong community. Many (Lieberman, 1988; Sarason, 1990, Shulman, 1989; Duckworth, 1986 and others) have emphasized the interconnectedness of teacher and school community pointing out as Sarason does, that schools unfortunately operate under the unverbalized assumption that,

> the conditions that make schools interesting places for children can be created and sustained by teachers for whom these conditions exist only minimally, at best (1971).

Current reform strategies emphasize organizational changes: smaller schools, magnet programs with a particular educational focus, site-based management, and school restructuring seek to personalize the school setting and professionalize teaching by empowering and promoting collegiality among teachers and administrators. These changes are essential. But, alone they will not result in stronger school community. Current reforms face three obstacles.

(1) Organizational efforts do not provide teachers with experiences on which to draw when faced with the challenge of developing school communities. Consequently, teacher behavior, even in settings which would accommodate community, often

reflects a liberal emphasis on individualism and autonomy. Reform efforts do little to develop teachers' familiarity with the benefits of communal settings. To foster community, teachers must be able to appreciate its value and the sense of connectedness that it can provide. Exposure to a community experience can be transformative in this way. It can provide an understanding of and foster a commitment to the notion of community.

Reformers' commitment to building strong teacher community is reflected in the current literature on teacher professionalism and collegiality. But professional and collegial relationships among teachers -- while desirable -- neither define nor exemplify teacher community. True community requires more than an agreement among professionals to respect one another's autonomy and to collaborate when it seems right. That teachers deserve respect as professionals and opportunities to work with other adults towards commonly-defined goals is not in question. When we foster professionalism and collegiality, we clearly improve on the impersonal, bureaucratic regulation and isolation of teachers so common in contemporary schools. Trusting those who are closest to the problem affords the best chance of finding a solution.

However, a commitment to professionalism -- to freeing teachers from bureaucratic regulation -- will not, on its own, result in teacher community. The vision of professionalism put forward in these reforms often emphasizes autonomy and not

community. It frees teachers from bureaucracy but does not necessarily connect them to one another. Would we be comfortable emulating the kind of professional relationships doctors and lawyers have achieved? While this may raise the status of teaching, might professional community be a contradiction in terms? Teachers cannot afford to work in isolation. They must take collective responsibility and share a common educational vision.

(2) Organizational efforts do not provide teachers with the pedagogical techniques or the curricular orientation necessary to effectively foster and sustain community in schools. Teachers need specific pedagogical skills which promote community.

Prominent reform strategies including restructuring, site-based management and bottom-up school change have drawn attention to the need for strong school communities. These organizational changes, while valuable, do not provide teachers with the necessary tools. In order to forge meaningful forms of school community, changes in pedagogical style and curricular content will be essential. We discuss the nature of these changes in the second part of this essay.

(3) Organizational efforts commonly emphasize the instrumental rather than intrinsic value of community. This undermines the work of those who strive to make the experience of school meaningful and communal.

The recent push for standardized state and national goals underscores an age-old dilemma. As the pressures of the current policy environment turn community into an instrumental concern, efforts to foster community which do not directly align with standardized measures of success come to be viewed as unnecessary frills and as an inappropriate use of scarce resources.

The result? Most educators committed to strong school communities privilege their instrumental value. Barth (1990), Sarason (1971), McLaughlin (1992) and Shulman (1989) all point to the need to connect teacher community with student learning. Shulman, for example, writes "Teacher collegiality and collaboration are not important merely for the improvement of morale and teacher satisfaction (which always sounds like a lame argument in favor of satisfied teachers, regardless of whether they succeed in teaching kids)" (p.167).

There is good reason to believe that strong, supportive teacher and school communities will have a positive influence on students' experiences in school. The work of McLaughlin (1992), Lieberman (1981, 1988), Wehlage (1988), Raywid (1988) and others makes this clear. But when the value of community is assessed by its impact on measures of academic achievement, it leaves those committed to community vulnerable by holding them accountable to goals which do not represent their true mission. Highly desirable school communities are not always characterized by good test scores. And many students in dysfunctional school communities achieve academically.

This is not to question the value of scholastic performance, nor the possible links between strong community and academic achievement. The argument here is that strong school communities, as ends in themselves, are important goals for educators.

If community is important, we must not obfuscate its vitality by trying to attach other educational goals.

Building Community Through Experience-Based Teacher Education

How can teacher education, then, respond to the need for both teacher and school community? Experience-based teacher education can respond to the three concerns described above: it provides teachers with the experience and skills necessary to create and nurture school community and, in so doing, it treats community as an intrinsically worthy process. In the remainder of this paper, we explore the ways in which experiential education can foster teacher and school community.

Experience is linked to community. The community both shapes and is shaped by experience. The example of the traditional barn-rasing may help to clarify this point. Local residents work together to build one farmer's barn. This event is often seen as testimony to the strength of nineteenth century rural communities. While barn-raising clearly necessitates strong bonds among neighbors, it is simultaneously a community-building experience. As local families engage in a common effort, their interdependence is made clear. The implications

for educators are dramatic.

Hamilton writes that experiential activities "place participants in responsible roles and engage them in cooperative, goal-directed activities with other youth, with adults, or both" (1980). Experiential strategies also draw from students' own experience and the experience of their peers rather than exclusively from instructors and textbooks.

As students work together, towards common goals, bonds form between students. Kenneth Bruffee tells us that it is "relationship which educates." Community is defined by those relationships. In short, experiential education can create forums in which bonds form and communities flourish.

The Experiential Curricula Project at Stanford

What would a teacher education program look like which teaches experiential techniques for fostering community? A student last year wrote "Teachers of teachers must model their models." It is that concern which drives this program.

There is both a macro and a micro aspect to the project. The big picture is one in which prospective teachers work together designing, implementing, reflecting on and redesigning experience-based curricula for high school students. Their work is informed by exploration of the literature on experiential teaching and learning and through the exchange and analysis of their own educational experiences.

The day-to-day classroom experiences reflect similar

priorities. The first day of class, for example, did not begin with a discussion of the syllabus, course requirements and the like. The lights were turned out and students engaged in a creative exercise which left them in one of six groups. In these groups, they discussed their best and worst educational experiences. For the remainder of the class and during much of the following three weeks, excerpts of these stories were categorized, analyzed, transcribed and distributed.

After considering one another's positive and negative educational experiences and the academic literature of Dewey and those who built on his work, the students created a conceptual framework for developing experiential, community-building, educational activities. This framework would later be used to inform their design of curricula for students from local high schools.

In what follows, we focus on the ways in which experience-based teacher education provides students with a sense of community as well as an understanding of pedagogical and curricular means of fostering community among students and teachers. In particular, we discuss some of the pedagogical characteristics both of the class and of the curricula which Stanford students developed and make a few comments on their connection with the creation of community.

Common Project

Today's schools stress autonomy and assess individual achievement. Even the value of cooperative learning is commonly measured by individual success. The promotion of community necessitates significant shifts in practice. Experiential educators often use collective projects to bring about such shifts.

Throughout the course the class worked together, for example, as they developed the curriculum for each school. One student explained that, "as we worked on the curricula we got to know a lot about each other's talents, values and temperaments." In addition, students assumed collective responsibility even when one student was administratively in charge of a particular event or activity. The Stanford students also used group experiences to foster community among the high school students during the implementation of activities they planned. The high school students designed political platforms, surveyed a plot of land and grappled together with dilemmas over park use by the disabled. Such activities teach students how to work together towards common ends at the same time that they demonstrate the degree to which our ability to pursue particular ends depends upon social organization.

These collective projects do not downplay individual difference. They provide an opportunity to showcase student talents and to model the use of these talents for social purposes. Rather than submerging the individual within the

group, such projects provide an opportunity and forum to develop individual identity within the group.

Out-of-Classroom Experience

The traditional norms of schools and classrooms often constrain the development of community. We must acknowledge a long history of individuality and emphasis on autonomy and competition. Altering student expectations, then, is important. Out of classroom experiences or norm-breaking in-classroom experiences (like creative exercises in the dark) can make the space needed to recast relationships in the classroom.

Building on Student Experience

Using students' own stories validates and makes real their contribution. The framework which students developed from these narratives bolstered their own efforts to create an experience-based curricula for high school students. This process transforms norms and expectations regarding viable and legitimate sources of knowledge. Most importantly, it strengthens community as students come to understand that the quality of the curricula they develop depends on their own sharing of ideas.

Emotional Engagement

Similarly, when students share personal and often emotionally significant experiences, they form bonds from a growing familiarity with each other's ideas, values and world

outlooks.

Students also become emotionally committed to successfully reaching the group goal. Motivation may stem in part from personal interest in the task and in part from a desire to help others in the group achieve their goals.

Motivation Without Competition

Dewey writes that:

> The mere absorbing of facts and truths is so exclusively individual an affair that it tends very naturally to pass into selfishness. Indeed, almost the only measure for success is a competitive one, in the bad sense of that term...so thoroughly is this the prevailing atmosphere that for one child to help another in his task has become a school crime (1956, pp.15-16).

Activities arranged so that one student's success depends on another's failure may undermine the bonds between participants. This form of extrinsic motivation often leads to narrow measures of school success and leaves little room to appreciate the diverse ways in which individuals can contribute to a group effort.

Reflection and Dissent

Community demands that students consider and critique varied perspectives and a wide range of evidence. Readings and discussions raised challenging alternative perspectives and exposed students to new and divergent ideas from both within and outside of the group. Building on the distinct talents and capacities of members, the class strove for consensus and, at

times, deferred to strongly-held minority opinion; respect for these opinions stem both from respect for members of the community and from a commitment to the belief that divergent ideas are often the engine of progress; the class aimed to honor dissent and encourage critique.

If Communities Exclude

Not everything went as expected. Students this year were required to take two consecutive terms of the course. Two students, however, who had not been present the first term, wanted to take the second. One had taken the first term the previous year (when it only was one term) and had therefore completed the prerequisite for the second term. The other was an undergraduate student who had helped develop a segment of the course dealing with special populations. Linda[3] is legally blind and was invaluable in our preparation for a program with learning disabled students who also had various physical disabilities.

Some students had very strong feelings about letting new people into the class. We discussed it for 30 minutes or so, and several students came to office hours to explain their positions. Two wrote 3 page notes explaining that they felt bad about not wanting to let other students into the class. This was an emotionally charged issue.

There are two dilemmas here:

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[3]"Linda" is a pseudonym.

The first is simply stated if difficult to resolve: strong communities can become unnecessarily exclusionary. Should a thriving community always be prepared to welcome new members? What are the consequences of excluding new members? Is this an inevitable dilemma or can communities be both strong and accessible?

The second is more elusive: A few students did not want newcomers diluting what they perceived as a lucky alliance of talented and warm individuals. Despite their experience (or perhaps because of it), students did not trust the process. Though they recognized the power of many of the techniques used in class (and we discussed many of them in detail), they continued to believe that good fortune had bestowed upon them these particular people -- that others coming in would not form similar bonds.

Why Worry About Community?

John Goodlad maintains the centrality of strong school communities in A Place Called School. He writes: "The most important thing about school for the children and youth who go there is the living out of their daily personal and social lives." Our motivation stems from concern that we are losing a sense of connection between individuals, and with it, much that makes lives meaningful.

Embracing the pursuit of strong school community as an intrinsically worthwhile endeavor will allow educators to start

from common ground. "How do we build community?" is then a sensible question from a research, policy and practice perspective. Teacher collegiality, professionalism, site-based management and smaller more personalized schools provide an organizational foundation from which to begin. When we expect only organizational changes, however, to result in strong school communities, we assume that teachers and administrators know how to turn organizational potential into truly communal relationships. Voices from the field indicate that this is rarely the case (Johnson, 1983; Little, 1990; Zeichner, 1991). Often hopes for professional community dissolve into individual protection of turf and competition for scarce resources.

There is a need for teacher training that gives participants a positive community experience and equips them with the pedagogical and curricular tools needed to adequately foster community among students. Experience-based teacher training and staff development offers a way to pursue the twin goals of teacher and school community.

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